Lateral

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Enlightenment by Any Other Name

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ABSTRACT This essay provides a cursory sketch of the circulation of science as a fetish object in critical theory—particularly by way of an attention to the conceptual popularity of science studies and various permutations of object oriented ontologies. It does so to identify how and under what terms scientific knowledge becomes a necessary site of interdisciplinary collaboration with the humanities, and challenges how these interdisciplinary trafficks disguise forms of epistemic priority ceded to the (hard) scientific method. Identifying in this movement a disavowal of racism in science's conceptual repertoire and its ongoing claims to objective facticity, the essay criticizes contemporary recourse to science as the newest frontier in critical theoretical scholarship. In contrast to this, the essay poses a much more skeptical approach to the ethics and methods by which such projects develop and critically circulate.

KEYWORDS Black studies, critical theory, new materialism, science

> "The dialogue between philosophy and biology has not yet occurred."
>
> – Catherine Malabou (interview)

Critical theory has experienced a remarkedly *scientific* turn of late. Scientific not in the sense of an investment in or a return to an unflinchingly orthodox Marxism, but in the sense of a renewed interest in and attention to the discursive transposition of research from the hard sciences into humanitarian inquiry.[1] Indeed, in many iterations, this renewed interest takes the form of an assumed superiority of knowledge produced by way of its interdisciplinary movement, where the romance of a so-called science studies functions as a signifying extension of the Enlightenment romance of science itself.[2] Whether in the form of increased interest in neuroscientific turns toward plasticity,[3] computer science

and coding,[4] mathematics,[5] developmental systems biology,[6] quantum mechanics,[7] gut health and the microbiome,[8] environmental science,[9] or the postgenomic turn,[10] one might consider scientific research a new attachment for critical theoretical scholarship.

However, despite the ubiquity of this object choice, very few of these examples treat the facts produced through scientific truth procedures as objects of critique or even epistemic distance. Instead, they opt to carry the assumptions of these findings *into* critical theory, asking how doing so imposes new ontological frames for social and political consideration.[11] This uptake has embedded itself so profoundly within humanistic inquiry that it is difficult to take seriously Malabou's claim that "[t]he dialogue between philosophy and biology has not yet occurred,"[12] even if by the provocation she means an inability to surpass an ontoepistemological division between the categories as they are formed in their first analytic instance. However, given the resolute determination of effort, *if* the dialogue has not yet occurred, if the breach remains unyielding in its distance, it is certainly not for want of trying—let alone an absence of outputs that, at the very least, place the two alongside each other and in critical, generative conversation.

In many ways, the sheer scale of this attempt should be unsurprising. We are living, after all, in remarkably inter-, anti-, trans-, para-, and even meta-disciplinary times. Given the pleasure induced by way of an assumed disciplinary transgression,[13] could there be anything more provocative than transcending the most fundamental disciplinary impasse conditioning contemporary knowledge production? In this context, is suturing the gap between the hard and soft sciences not the most perfected realization of the dreams of interdisciplinarity? Of the imperative to think otherwise? How else could the uptake of an historically conservative epistemic domain, that of hard sciences and the epistemology of critical falsifiability, come to take the form of the most innovative and radical locus for political action? Wonderland's inversions loom.

A substantial bulwark of this turn in contemporary critical theory maintains a genealogical debt to new materialism and the much-maligned object-oriented ontologies (or OOO if you prefer its campy acronym).[14] Of course, raising OOO inexorably animates the specter of Jane Bennett,[15] a scholar whose influence on contemporary critical theory is, for better and worse, beyond the realm of question. Bennett, the preeminent theorist of this conjuncture, and her monolithic text *Vibrant Matter* have become a sort of shorthand for the new materialist turn, and all its political, social, and philosophical vicissitudes. While Bennett's work—with its shocking disregard for structural antagonisms especially around its treatment of race—in many ways begs its status as repository for relentless critique, continuing to focus on her text seems to both overstate, even reify, its contemporary relevance[16] and grab at all-too-low-hanging fruit. While the prolific nature of her work secures the need to repeat (and exhaust) the criticism, it also appears too often to take the form of a banal discursive strategy for overcoming the new materialist challenge without rigorously considering the scale of its thought.[17] If the force of new materiality is going to be taken seriously, both as a prompt to greater interrogation or a point of critique, it merits a richer examination than the infamous travails of a single scholar.

Bennett's work is, itself, indebted to the actor-network theory of Bruno Latour, although her insistence on the primary acting force of matter outside symbolic power seems, in many ways, to fundamentally misread the claims Latour is making. While Bennett has become canonized as the (in)famous scholar demanding we let things speak, a more attentive history returns us to a Latour prior to his politics of things (or *ding*,[18] if we take his resistance to translate the term seriously) and to the problematics that precipitated this focus—beginning from his identification of scientific objects as processes emergent through (rather than independent from) systems of social subjectivity.[19] We were, after all, never modern.

I raise the disavowal of Latour here not to rehash the lengthy genealogy of thought conditioning matter and science's contemporary purchase (this would take us down an all-too-long road including detours through Donna Haraway, Isabelle Stengers, Vinciane Despret, and Michel Serres), but rather to begin flagging just how dense and historically constituted this intellectual field is. The critical theoretical purchase of science is not so much a trend of the moment but an expression of a longer fixation on and interest in the problem of matter and its epistemic purchase. In this sense, the "scientific turn" might be nothing less than a symptom of the broader turn to materiality anew, another discursive reanimation of the desire to defeat and transcend the Kantian episteme without Hegelianism, through recourse to the crude facticity of empirical substance.[20]

But this desire to *let things speak* prompts a strange series of conclusions, perhaps because it cannot, at the end of the day, overcome and defeat Immanuel Kant in the way it wishes. As Tapji Garba makes clear in their excellent critique of the posthuman turn,[21] "without subscribing to a Kantian transcendental subject, the problem is that *a priori* categories . . . are left unanalyzed, and thus relied on uncritically."[22] This means that the kinds of category critiques necessary for rigorous humanities scholarship are abandoned in the interest of fetishizing scientific ontologies,[23] leaving us with only a reification of the pre-existing order. It would be enough if this were the only problem, but this emphasis on the material and ultimately uncritical uptake of the sciences leads to strange (and dangerous) conclusions about the broader structural state of things that more rigorous interrogations of the scientific might not so easily beget. For example, this romanticization markedly takes the form of what I call the eugenic discontinuity hypothesis, a belief in a break between the racial sciences of eugenics prior to 1940 and the humanist sciences of the post-war era. This hypothesis (although it is articulated as a kind of fact) is based on a historical approach that frames the post–World War II scientific imaginary as haunted by the genocidal impulses of Nazi race science.[24] In their desire to distance themselves from the Holocaust, biomedical scientists began a process of

rearticulating the universalist politics inherent to science in general and cellular and molecular medicine in specific.[25] And so, because the scientists themselves contend their science is opposed to racial eugenics, it must, as the critics seem to suppose, be so.

This is one component of the argument in Nikolas Rose's massively influential text *The Politics of Life Itself*, where he argues that the "styles of biological and biomedical thinking that inform ways of governing others and ourselves in the advanced liberal polities of the West are no longer those concerning the quality of the race."[26] Instead, he argues, the biopolitics of optimization organizing contemporary populations rupture race through their attention to the scale of molecularity and the molecular as the point of intervention. When attending to the literal uses of race as an organizing variable for medical research, Rose claims, through the transits of an almost unbelievable idealism, that race is merely a weak surrogate for ancestral biomedical aggregation.[27] The fact that some Black scientists invest in these forms of science (and non-scientists as a mechanism to identify ancestral history) means for Rose the work is necessarily detached from a racial structure of knowledge, and instead expresses a "biosociality and active biological citizenship."[28] On this reading, biological science is actively refigured as the site for an emancipatory vision of the human, a *humanistic biology*, one that sees in science a means to radically equalize and ultimately disappear race through its naturalization.[29] Black scientists who defend a racial-genetic basis for health are inversely figured as the reason for the ongoing turn to race science, and positioned as an alibi to disappear violence from the science of race they espouse. Within this theoretical system, race science literally becomes rearticulated as a new mode of agential citizenship, and the impulse to know oneself genetically is treated as a kind of given desire, rather than one constructed within a pre-existing symbolic field.[30]

Given his immense popularity, Rose's reductions are symptomatic of this general insistence on a turn to the crude fact of matter itself.[31] For this scholarship, the

attention to the materiality of the molecule means that race necessarily disappears because the molecular scale acts *outside* the racial episteme. Buttressed by an understanding of post-1945 biology as a departure from the racial structure of eugenics[32] and the avowal that its procedures can indeed ground a new humanism, material force of science is repositioned within its proper Enlightenment trajectory.[33] Biological humanism's desperate insistence to repudiate Nazism means, for these scholars, that the field of knowledge production, even as it returns to sociobiology and evolutionary psychology, evades a racial eugenic project. What is instead offered by the contemporary biopolitical regime is a *de*raced field of optimization that assumes a general theoretical disappearance of race from its auto-instituting epistemic infrastructures. Science becomes, for its ostensible critic, the vehicle for the realization of the promise of human development.

But, and here's the inconvenient snag, eugenics is not over. Its continuity remains structural to the very knowledge procedures that critical science theorists take on wholesale as points of entry into an unmitigated materiality. And so, to take the humanist scientist at their word—that they have overcome eugenics, and that their science scaffolds the possibility for a renewed anti-racist humanism—simply *because they say so* reflects a profoundly anti-intellectual betrayal of the project of critique. Whereas the social critics' historical duty is to interrogate the discrepancies between the narrativization of a science and the content of its epistemic procedures, under this new (materialist) theoretical framework, the supposed critic becomes scientism's most dogmatic alibi. Affirming the epistemological force of empiricism, the critical theorist of science secures and reproduces the conditions of eugenics precisely through its disavowal. The harmonization of methods between science and its critique obscures the fundamental incommensurability that should structure the terms of their relation. To accept without analysis the objects and categories of the hard sciences and thus to reify and assimilate them into humanitarian or critical humanist inquiry is to abdicate the role of the critical theorist in relation to both the science of

knowledge and the knowledge of science. In a humiliating reversal,[34] the critic performs their own self-abnegation, fantasizing the indignity of surrender as interdisciplinary entente.

Of course, science studies is not a monolith, and many within the field attempt to push against its more dominating trends. The eugenic discontinuity hypothesis stands in stark contrast to work operating within what Ruha Benjamin terms "critical race STS,"[35] a field operating at the intersection of science and technology studies and critical theories of race.[36] Against this trend toward theorizing the disappearance of race, scholars in this subfield consistently identify mechanisms through which race science is perpetually *reanimated* despite humanistic science's disavowal of a eugenic impulse.[37] When confronted with the claim that race science is an artifact of the (not so) distant past, critical race science and technology scholars excavate how, despite (and often *through*) this claim, race is rearticulated (even molecularized)[38] in our contemporary moment.[39] Taking the question of racial justice as a central and orienting problematic, critical race STS grounds its analysis in questions about the ongoingness of race science and the implications this holds for critical political projects invested in anti-racism.

This contrast designates one particular impasse between the ensemble of questions and debates animating contemporary (white) science studies and its critical race counterpart. While Benjamin is invested in "urging a sustained, field-wide commitment to incorporating critical race approaches in the study of science and technology,"[40] I am more interested in noting this aporia as symptomatic of a much deeper disciplinary fissure, one that cannot be so readily or easily recuperated.[41] Rather than assuming that what is needed for a more critical study of science and technology is the incorporation of Black critical theoretics into its conceptual arsenal, what I understand this fissure to be expressive of is an extant and ongoing antagonism, one that is constituted through the field's very formation. In some ways, this is to tarry with the possibility

that science studies is a foundationally white enterprise, a white conspiracy. Not simply a question of its historic and contemporary demographic makeup or the central analytics it is currently preoccupied with,[42] there is, built into its assumptive logics, a racialism that animates its enterprise.

The Dialogue Must (Not) Occur

I can't pretend that I haven't sometimes read many of these texts from a similar place of awe and pleasure. But as much as I enjoy examples of critical work happening within the field of science studies (I cannot discount the possibility that it is, perhaps, *because* I enjoy them),[43] I remain suspicious concerning their political stakes and the contexts animating their interventions—particularly of a material basis for politics grounded in knowledge generated through facts produced through the scientific method (and then transposed or applied by critical humanities scholars).[44] This assumption makes common cause with a racist, technofascist impulse, rather than a democratic one as it so often ostensibly articulates itself, and risks reinforcing a racial structure of knowledge predicated on the self-determining subject distanced from a radical exteriority.[45] It is one thing to debate the ontological transformations endemic to the discourse of science itself,[46] but quite another to pose that these transformations must then impose on humanities scholarship a concomitant transformation in the structure of its knowledge and its understanding of the human.[47] In the former move, an intellectual history of science operates on the terms of science as its explicit given, in the latter, science's understanding of a material real is reified by way of its importation into the humanities and the assumed leverage it has in problematizing the pre-existing conceptual arsenal. This is buttressed by an implicitly Enlightenment logic that the epistemological procedure of science inherently provides *progressively improved* knowledge that is neutral of idealist bias, an assumption revealed by the constant turn to modern breakthroughs as the conceptual tools inhering this positive transformative capacity.

To make the political and ethical stakes of my critique clear, by implying that humanities scholarship must give way to innovations in scientific theory, (hard) science is implicitly positioned as the more rigorous material enterprise of the two. This is supported by a second (but not secondary) belief that—because (hard) science provides a superior epistemological procedure for accessing material fact, because (hard) science is, indeed, the privileged point of methodological access to a material real—humanitarian scholarship should give way to and assimilate itself within (hard) science's epistemic formation. This is a two-fold maneuver, that both reifies the notion of an external, objective world, and concomitantly argues that access to it provides the primary methodological procedure for producing a truth claim.[48] The outcome of this maneuver is simple: that humanities must always cede to science epistemological priority. How are we to understand the demand for this convergence in the anti-intellectual context within which we currently reside? With what politics do they interface in a context where humanities are under attack for their insistence on the theoretical and the cultural as necessary objects of analytic attention? To ask these questions is not to flirt with anti-scientism (although there are conscientious objections to be made concerning its politics of expertise),[49] nor is it to demand a defense in toto of humanist scholarship,[50] but instead to point to the fascist epistemologies that are, to evoke George Jackson, already here,[51] the fascist epistemologies that seek to order our worlds through a social calculus inextricable from the promise of positivistic totality.[52] The desire for "the dialogue between biology and philosophy," as Malabou so aptly puts it,[53] seems inextricable from the broader epistemic terms conditioning our critiques, a context where anti-intellectualism often takes the form of crude defensive postures concerning the objectivity of science,[54] a context where various departments are shuttered by administrators for their lack of immediate workplace translatability, a context where the trafficking in of scientific research into critical modes of social and political theorizing seems indissoluble from the disappearance of humanities scholarship writ large that is structuring the desire for that movement in the first instance.[55]

Malabou's deferred convergence, the dialogue between science and philosophy that hasn't happened, but that, to her mind, must, is a dialogue that is not only already happening, but also is, in fact, repeatedly *made* to happen. It is the desire for this convergence, this repeated performance of ritualistic concession and the demand made therein, that is precisely the thing to ward against. This is not to ask for a renewal of forms of epistemic isolationism between the disciplines (did they ever really exist?), but to ask about the importance of politics quite literally in the strategic games of a broader cultural war.

In the wake of this dilemma, I am left with nothing but a series of pithy deconstructive questions:[56] Must we trust the science in critical theory, if trust becomes an index of its uncritical incorporation—or worse yet, its repositioning as the very engine of our conceptual development? What would it mean to resist the ontologies of scientific research as they inhere in critical theory's methods? Is such a move possible in our current conjuncture? Is it desirable? What is the object of the critic? What is a critical study of science and technology that takes for granted both of its core terms? Whence the split between biology and philosophy? And why the suture?

Perhaps I'm saying the dialogue must not happen, even if it is already ongoing, even if I am inexorably conscripted into it by the very nature of my refutation. As much as it pains me to say, I am *of*, not *in* it, after all.[57] But perhaps even this minor admission is an alibi, one attempting to ask as if I and we can position ourselves outside of an inheritance that conditions our arrival to position in the first instance: "For what might be necessary prior to the moment of a definitive refusal is to think both the essence (understood in its historicity) and the possibility of refusal as such."[58] What would remain of the humanities outside its desperate attempt to wash itself clean of the imperfections of its positivism, its shame over a subjective detritus marring the authorial strength of its claims? Is a self-inflicted ignominy the primary mark of difference between itself and its aspiration toward science? Is humiliation the only destiny for the critic?

Ironically, and contra the romance of scientism at play in the humanitarian act of surrender, what the hard sciences and humanities *share* is an inability to live up to the positivistic promise. The subject's epistemic debris always remains structural to claim. As neither fulfils Enlightenment's promise, both are bonded in their failure. Humanitarian scholarship's primary difference is the psycho-epistemic complex engendered by this failure, uniquely plagued as it is by a doubled insecurity. Unable to fulfil the promise of positivism, but also unable to dissimulate its failures like hard science, humanities has nothing left to it but a desperate attempt to simulate what is already simulation. As we live in the profoundly anti-intellectual wreckage of Enlightenment, it is difficult to know how best to negotiate this aporetic entanglement. Surely the uncritical embrace of science only further intensifies the dilemma, but so too does humanities' uncritical defense. And for this reason, until the dream to fulfill Enlightenment's positivism can be effectively disinherited, perhaps warding against the ritual performance of surrender, delineating the etiological foundations of this state of ruin, is the only task adequate to our current state of political triage. At the very least, and certainly for the science of theory (to say nothing of the theory of science), it is the only task worthy of criticism's name.

Notes

1. Although I shift between the language of humanitarian, humanities, and humanistic study, I tend to focus on "humanitarian" because of its connotations with the common good. While "humanities" seems to evoke more of a neutral field formation and "humanists" risks emphasizing a particular Renaissance intellectual movement (one that many contemporary antihumanist humanities scholars reject), "humanitarian" seems to effectively capture both the domain of study I am concerned with alongside its mandates to particular forms of moralistic intervention. ↩
2. Here I am thinking particularly of the work of Auguste Comte and its legacies. Comte argued that the production of knowledge develops along three stages: theological, metaphysical, and then positivistic. For Comte, positivism and its emphasis on strict sciences of empirical observation provided the apex of epistemological development. Comte's work is the inheritance of social theory, as his argument for a science of society provides a foundation for disciplinary sociology itself. ↩

3. Victoria Pitts-Taylor, *The Brain's Body: Neuroscience and Corporeal Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016) ↩

4. Katherine McKittrick, *Dear Science and Other Stories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 118 ↩

5. Denise Ferreira Da Silva "On Matter Beyond the Equation of Value," *e-Flux* 79 (2017), https://www.e-flux.com/journal/79/94686/1-life-0-blackness-or-on-matter-beyond-the-equation-of-value < https://www.e-flux.com/journal/79/94686/1-life-0-blackness-or-on-matter-beyond-the-equation-of-value> . ↩

6. Susan Oyama, *Evolution's Eye: A Systems View of the Biology-Culture Divide* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000). ↩

7. Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007). ↩

8. Elizabeth Wilson, *Gut Feminism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015). ↩

9. Max Liboiron, *Pollution is Colonialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021). ↩

10. Catherine Malabou, "One Life Only: Biological Resistance, Political Resistance," *Critical Inquiry* 42 (3): 429–38, https://criticalinquiry.uchicago.edu/one_life_only < https://criticalinquiry.uchicago.edu/one_life_only/> . ↩

11. One of the clearest exceptions to this romanticization is Ruha Benjamin's oeuvre, but most especially her emphasis on computerized and algorithmic forms of racism. Ruha Benjamin, *Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Crow* (Cambridge: Polity, 2019). ↩

12. Catherine Malabou, "Interview with Catherine Malabou," in *Plastic Materialities: Politics, Legality, and Metamorphosis in the Work of Catherine Malabou* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 294. ↩

13. Robyn Wiegman, *Object Lessons* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 80. ↩

14. For an elegant deconstructionist analysis of this inheritance, see Axelle Karera's "The Pitfalls of Anthropocene Ethics" (2019). ↩

15. Boo! ↩

16. To be clear, I do not wish to *understate* the significance of *Vibrant Matter* either. To the contrary, it remains perhaps the single most important text for crystallizing the new materialist intervention. However, in our present scholarly moment, its circulation most frequently takes the form of its critique—even by sympathetic scholars. Thus, rather than continuing to doggedly point to its limitations, I am interested in confronting the underlying discursive dynamics that rendered possible its composition. ↩

17. I have absolutely no interest in rehearsing the debates surrounding new materialism and hope my reader can agree that Bennett's monumental and influential status within critical theory is, at this point, (unfortunately) self-evident. A quick search of *Vibrant*

Matter in Google Scholar confirms the text's epicentral status. At the time of this writing it is just shy of 20,000 citations. ↩

18. Bruno Latour, "From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik: Or How to Make Things Public," *Making Things Public-Atmospheres of Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005). ↩

19. The early Bruno Latour, especially his co-authored work *Laboratory Life*, feels qualitatively distinct from the Latour in "Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam?" While the early work is beset with its own issues, especially Latour's anthropological investment in alterity which cannot but help reproducing a fetishized epistemological pluralism disguised as constructivism, these problems are markedly distinct from the issues plaguing our contemporary conjuncture. ↩

20. By a defeat of the Kantian episteme, I mean the transcendental synthesis Kant offers that poses a kind of idealism as interwoven with the material—an idealism that ultimately becomes the condition for our access *to* the material. ↩

21. A turn that is symptomatic of the broader turn to materiality itself as the mechanism for a rigorous, humanitarian anti-humanism. ↩

22. Tapji Garba, "On Materialism, Freedom, and Self-Consciousness," *Philosophy Today* 67 (2023): 833–50, https://doi.org/10.5840/philtoday2023104505 < https://doi.org/10.5840/philtoday2023104505> . ↩

23. Annemarie Mol's *The Body Multiple* becomes such a clear and strange example of this when she argues that the methodological incommensurabilities of various cancer sciences index a distinct ontology of the body between them. For Mol, this distinct ontology is not operative at the level of discourse, but instead reflects differences in material character of the same body; thus, *the body multiple*. Annemarie Mol, *The Body Multiple: Ontology in Medical Practice* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002). ↩

24. This is captured by UNESCO's articulation of a "scientific humanism," envisioned by Joseph Needham and Julian Huxley, as a way of moving forward in the post WWII era. See Elena Aronova, "Studies of Science Before 'Science Studies': Cold War and the Politics of Science in the U.S., U.K., and U.S.S.R.," PhD diss., (University of California, San Diego, 2012). ↩

25. Aronova, "Studies," 45. ↩

26. Nikolas Rose, *The Politics of Life Itself: Biomedicine, Power, and Subjectivity in the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 69 ↩

27. Rose, *Politics*, 185. The force of Garba's critique is made particularly visible here, but we might also ask, alongside Sexton, how the racial politics of HIV/AIDS and genomics both "share a common ground of concern at the molecular scale" (Jared Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes: Antiblackness and the Critique of Multiracialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 236). Ultimately then, *against* Rose and *with* Sexton, we must ask "What is race, and where is race to be located in the body?" (Sexton, *Amalgamation*, 236). ↩

28. Rose, *Politics*, 176 ↩

29. Scholarship following in this theoretical vein, even when it attends to race, ultimately makes absurd conclusions about race's structural force and organizing power. This most often occurs through the reification of a crude understanding of biopolitics where conceptual conflations between race and disability lend themselves to a ruse of analogy and subsequent perverse claim that disability supplants race. ↩

30. Blackness, as the condition of possibility for racial differentiation, effectively grounds this new science of race. ↩

31. Both symptomatic but also, of course, an active and ongoing contributor. That is, while Rose of course contributes to the shape of this problem, his own intervention is conditioned by the broader epistemic history I am tracing. ↩

32. Maurizio Meloni, *Political Biology: Science and Social Values in Human Heredity from Eugenics to Epigenetics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). ↩

33. Aranova's dissertation provides a particularly provocative reading of how history of science was always built into the Enlightenment project. See Note 23. ↩

34. And it *is* humiliating. ↩

35. Ruha Benjamin, "Catching Our Breath: Critical Race STS and the Carceral Imagination," *Engaging Science, Technology, and Society* 2: 146, https://doi.org/10.17351/ests2016.70 < https://doi.org/10.17351/ests2016.70> . ↩

36. Other scholars, such as Moya Bailey and Whitney Peoples in their essay "Towards a Black Feminist Health Science Studies" have worked to explicitly focalize race in scholarship on science and health in the form of a kind of field forming call. (Moya Bailey and Whitney Peoples, "Towards a Black Feminist Health Science Studies," *Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, Technoscience* 3 no. 2 (2017): 1–27, https://https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A561685864/AONE?u=anon~4df6c462&sid=googleScholar&xid=1288ec7d.) I focus on Benjamin's work here, however, for both its citational and conceptual currency, as well as its technoscientific breadth. ↩

37. Anne Pollock, "On the Suspended Sentences of the Scott Sisters: Mass Incarceration, Kidney Donation, and the Biopolitics of Race in the United States," *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 40 no. 2 (2015): 250–71, https://doi.org/10.1177/0162243914539569 < https://doi.org/10.1177/0162243914539569> . Brett St. Louis, "Race as Technology and the Carceral Methodologies of Molecular Racialization," *The British Journal of Sociology* 73 no. 1 (2022): 216–19, https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12918 < https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12918> . ↩

38. Duana Fullwiley, "The Molecularization of Race: Institutionalizing Human Difference in Pharmacogenetics Practice," *Science as Culture* 16 no. 1: 1–30, https://doi.org/10.1080/09505430601180847 < https://doi.org/10.1080/09505430601180847> . ↩

39. Counter to the eugenic discontinuity hypothesis, there are myriad studies interrogating the interpenetration of coloniality with molecularity. See for key examples: Margarida Mendes, "Molecular Colonialism," https://www.anthropocene-curriculum.org/contribution/molecular-colonialism < https://www.anthropocene-curriculum.org/contribution/molecular-colonialism> (2017), and Michelle Murphy, "Against Population, Toward Alterlife," in *Making Kin Not Population* (Chicago: Prickly Press Paradigm, 2018), 101–24. ↩

40. Benjamin, "Catching," 146. ↩

41. I consider my project apposite to Benjamin's, a critical extension that seeks to identify just how profoundly STS must be deconstructed in order to respond to her demands. ↩

42. Things are undoubtedly quite dire when intersectionality is still a keyword that is unable to circulate with ease within the field (see Patrick R. Grzanka, Jenny Dyck Brian, and Rajani Bhatia, "Intersectionality and Science and Technology Studies," *Science, Technology, & Human Values* (2023), https://doi.org/10.1177/016224392312017 < https://doi.org/10.1177/016224392312017>). To be clear, I am not advocating for its appropriation by STS, but rather recognizing the almost shocking fact that science studies will not even participate in the, by now, broad-based antiBlack theft of intersectionality as a conceptual resource predicated on the assumption of its fungible conceptuality. See Sirma Bilge, "The Fungibility of Intersectionality: An Afropessimist Reading," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 43(13) (2020): 2298–326, https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2020.1740289 < https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2020.1740289> . ↩

43. Michel Serres and his text *Hermes*, especially is, in my opinion, woefully underread in our present moment. Michel Serres, *Hermes: Literature, Science, Philosophy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982). ↩

44. To clarify, this scholarship is not merely indicative of a capitulation to a positivist social science. More strangely, it is an investment in the positivism of science itself, which can then carry claims *into* the non-positivist, theoretical world of social thought. Perhaps generously read, a kind of epistemic symbiosis is what is on offer. ↩

45. Denise Ferreira Da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007). ↩

46. This is really the core interest of a text like *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, which was not interested in contending with these different epistemic ruptures as anything other than uniquely *scientific* discursive breaks that are no more inherently material than any other series of discourse[47. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions: Fourth Edition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012). ↩

47. For example, a burgeoning field of critical inquiry has relied on the fetishistic uptake of epigenetic and postgenomic research as a conceptual resource to retheorize the human. See: Evelyn Fox Keller, *The Mirage of a Space Between Nature and Nurture*

(Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Catherine Malabou, "One Life Only;" and Samantha Frost, "Ten Theses on the Subject of Biology and Politics: Conceptual, Methodological, and Biopolitical Considerations," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Biology and Society* (London: Palgrave Macmillan), 897–924.

48. To return to the strange uptake of science in feminist technoscience, while feminist STS scholars generally maintain a greater level of criticality, this often ends up, such as in the case of Mol, taking the form of a belief in *multiple* overlapping ontologies. Thus, the core assumption that science's epistemological apparatus accesses the real is reinforced through its displacement.

49. Ruha Benjamin, "The Emperor's New Genes: Science, Public Policy, and the Lure of Objectivity," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 661 no. 1 (2015): 130–42, https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716215587859 < https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716215587859> .

50. Humanist scholarship, of course, has its own intimacies with racism—including the science of race through anthropology and travel writing. The humanist project of race always and already underwrites the science categorically.

51. George Jackson, *Blood in My Eye* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1990), 72.

52. I hopefully need not rehearse the foundational critique laid out by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* to draw out the connections between rationalism, positivism, and fascist preoccupations with technocracy. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

53. Malabou, "Interview," 294

54. Think here of the use of science to ground transphobia.

55. This is obviously a recursive circuit. Humanists invest in science to protect the integrity of humanitarian inquiry, which then cedes epistemic priority to science and so structures the terms of humanities destruction. I suspect this is more unconsciously than consciously performed, an unnoticed compulsion responding to this interdisciplinary demand.

56. We are, at the time of this writing, in a resurgence of the 1990s after all.

57. In general, I find the defensive maneuver to say one is in but not of an institution rather tiresome (and thank you to the anonymous reviewer for also pointing out how it is insidiously Christian).

58. Axelle Karera, "Paraontology: Interruption, Inheritance, or a Debt One Often Regrets," *Critical Philosophy of Race* 10 no. 2 (2022): 170, https://doi.org/10.5325/critphilrace.10.2.0158 < https://doi.org/10.5325/critphilrace.10.2.0158> .

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